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Who is Responsible for the Child— Is Anyone Responsible?

By "A BACHELOR"

THAT Old-maid Aunt irritates me! The concluding paragraph of her otherwise rather pretty and sweet story is my only provocation for writing. Mind you, I have never seen the lady in question, nor have I the remotest idea as to who she is. Frankly, I inquired concerning her so that I might better appreciate her philosophy. But even women editors at times realize the value of a confidence, expressed or implied * * * how dare I continue now?

Really, however, I am not quite as bad as that, and I must confess that women are not entirely devoid of certain virtues. And yet I must guard against betraying a weakness said to be rather common with them—I must strive to divorce completely the personal touch. Two reasons prompt me to such a course. First, something emphasizes the occasion as one demanding an effort at a semblance of gallantry because the lady concerned is unknown. Second, it is quite possible that I may meet her, and it is not always easy, satisfactorily, to explain away the written word—to a woman!

Essentially, her plea is to discount the importance of the parents in the welfare of their child. Admittedly, she does not say that the parents are without any influence in shaping the life of the child. What she leads one to infer is that such influence is quite smaller than is commonly accepted as the case. This should, in justice to her, be modified. For she would make a distinction between immediate parents (mother and father) and other parents of varying remoteness (grandmother and grandfather, great-grandmother and great-grandfather, and so on as far back as one wishes or dares to go to establish a point). In other words, she virtually accepts the molding power of heredity in the conduct of offspring, but she would too generously acknowledge the credit or blame due to the ages that have passed.

This difficulty is really one of degree and not of kind. We graciously concur in the tribute she would pay our ancestor's worth. One could hardly do otherwise on reflection. We all of us have one mother and one father, two grandmothers and two grandfathers, four great-grandmothers and four great-grandfathers, eight great-great-grandmothers and eight great-great-grandfathers, and so on. As we go back from generation to generation we observe that the number of our grandparents increases—increases very rapidly, at a geometrical rate, as one says. It requires but little imagination to see the end of this process of rapid multiplication of forbears.

If we go back but a comparatively short time, as far as the age of man is concerned, we are struck with the idea that most of us must be blood relatives. There simply were not enough grandparents so that each of us might have his or her own family tree distinct from another's.

Or, to take another illustration, let us choose an extraordinarily simple bit of

life, a single cell. It literally multiplies by dividing. For, from one cell we get two cells by a process of subdivision and growth, and from two cells we get four, and from the four cells eight, and so on, until after a surprisingly small number of generations (neglecting deaths and so-called twinnings and the like) we find that there have actually descended or ascended directly from the one cell millions of other cells. These are all "blood relatives." In each of these cells there must be something belonging to the original cell. It is a clear case of heredity, of transmitted characteristics.

Just to digress for a moment, we see here a kind of proof offered by some of life-hereafter, even of immortality, possibly, because the first cells, just like our very remote ancestors, really never died in the sense that part of them go on living in their descendants.

We grant, then, the contribution of our more or less remote ancestors. But we insist that this contribution for a given ancestor, as for a given cell, must be less, the more removed it is from the latest offspring. Obviously, the first cell after being divided, as it were, many millions of times thru the host of later generations, is found but to an extremely small degree in its latest, or shall we say

youngest, members. That is, the ninetyth generation, for example, has given more of itself to the ninety-first generation than has, let us say, the fifth generation.

One conspicuous weakness of this argument lies in this; it is quite probable that from the point of view of heredity the sum of the contributions of the first eighty-nine generations may exceed that of the ninetyth alone. But we are interested now in making a case for the immediate parents, to show that a given generation has more effect, contributes more, than a generation further removed from the offspring under consideration—the child of today.

Even were this not the case it still would be inexpedient (as distasteful as this term may be at times) to agree with our friend the Old-maid Aunt that, "They (the children) belong to the race and not to any individual father or mother." I almost find myself incoherent because of something akin to rage, I hardly dare say righteous indignation, when I read that sentence.

Doesn't it hurt just a little to be told that after all we are just so many "Topics"? That we "jest grewed"? Doesn't it wear rather harshly, or even cruelly tear that delicate fabric which so beautifully covers a home, to be told that the mothers and fathers should not take their efforts too seriously, that, after all, Mary and Johnnie will pull thru in one way or another?

But I must repress what appears to be the fount of gushing and maudlin sentimentality. A Bachelor isn't supposed to do that even when writing for a journal devoted primarily to the ladies!

Now, that is only part of the story. The factors determining the conduct of all things, both animate and inanimate, may be classified conveniently under two headings. First, there is heredity. Second, there is environment. We have considered only the first. What of the second?

Environment plays a variable role in one's life. But always some kind of a part. Some enthusiasts would exaggerate its importance, while others with a zeal no less ardent would minimize its value. There is even a third group which can see no distinction between it and heredity. This, however, does not seriously affect the issue, for then it is merely a question of definition.

Granting that environment must be considered as a contributing factor in the upbringing of a child, and omitting entirely any consideration of its comparative value with heredity, we have to use it in the case of "The individual father or mother" vs. "The race." Here it is rather difficult to attempt any quantitative study, an expression in mathematical terms, as some will do in the case of heredity. It really does seem reasonable, however, to expect that the ninetyth generation can better influence the environment of the ninety-first generation

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observing two rules when rearranging her kitchen.

1. Articles used together should be grouped together.

2. Articles used oftenest should be kept in the most convenient places.

Tho there are many unforeseen things arising in household duties every housewife should have a time for doing the routine work, and by placing things in their correct places these duties need require only one-half the time ordinarily given. Every housewife should ask herself the question—are short cuts in housekeeping worth while? Is my kitchen so planned that it is a step-saving kitchen? If these questions cannot be answered in the affirmative, the housewife should study her kitchen for, undoubtedly, rearrangement is her solution to short cuts in housekeeping.

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than can the fifth generation. That is, one's immediate parents are in a better position probably to affect the environment of a child than are his grandparents, great or otherwise.

Well, after all, who is responsible for the child? If it be the race, then I am tempted to repeat the subheading, "Is Anyone Responsible for the Child"? To me, someone is responsible for the child. To me, the immediate parents are largely responsible for the child.

"Life is a peculiar mess." (Philosopher quite unknown.) Someone has aptly compared life with a person walking along a railroad and trying to keep his balance. It is difficult work at times, for altho one becomes more expert with practice, it calls for an unusual effort, an almost comic, were it not tragic, series of contortions, to remain on that small pathway. And people will fall off, either to the one side or to the other. And even with much experience that comes with years, one occasionally will find it difficult to focus the attention on the track, and falls come which may be of varying severity. It is probably true that no one ever succeeds in going ahead without some close calls, or an occasional slip or mis-step, or even a fall.

How remain on the track, going ahead, and yet diminish the number of falls? Man acts both by reason and instinct. A crisis comes into one's life. Immediate decision and action are required. There is practically no time for deliberation, and possibly deliberation will help little because of the almost balanced and conflicting emotions. At that time one who has been brought up with a goodly measure of the so-called homely virtues will probably instinctively recall such virtues and automatically govern his conduct accordingly.

And from where are these homely virtues recruited? From the home in large part, and thru the efforts of the mother and father in large part, and of the two, quite probably more from the mother than the father.

But what on earth have homely virtues to do with child responsibility? What responsibilities should one have in mind in considering the child's welfare? Health? Religion? Morals? Careers?—to mention only a few, and not including the tolerance, the deference due a lady, even tho she be an Old-Maid Aunt!

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